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ABSTRACT

The underlying themes in a successful dropout-prevention program are that it is teacher-led and student-centered. In this, the third National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) report, project leaders offer guidelines for developing a successful prevention initiative. Suggestions are made on the following objectives: (1) empower teachers to drive the initiative; (2) tailor programs to fit student needs; (3) set high, yet reasonable, expectations; (4) collaborate with community players; (5) offset future problems by intervening early; (6) recruit school district support; and (7) enlist and energize parents as partners. Exemplary dropout prevention programs are listed, with each one's key aims and/or strategies. (JD)

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# A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

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1990

# PARTNERS AND SUPPORT

**Young people dropping out of school is society's concern.** The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education has had many partners in its effort to develop and implement successful dropout prevention programs nationwide.

Among NFIE's partners have been funders:

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**The National Education Association**, whose members contributed $1.7 million to launch the dropout prevention effort, and whose continued support builds NFIE's endowment, thus allowing NFIE to continue its Dropout Prevention Program.

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The support of all of these partners has benefitted students across the country.



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# LESSONS LEARNED: NFIE'S DROPOUT PREVENTION INITIATIVE

**In the four years that have passed since the publication of our first "blueprint" document on dropout prevention, the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education has learned much about the operation of successful dropout prevention programs nationwide.** Our foundation has funded 47 programs in 22 states, involving more than 3,300 students and more than 500 teachers and counselors. Through this effort, we have had the opportunity to test the seven principles of dropout prevention outlined in "Operation Rescue: A Blueprint for Success."

Back then, we noted that dropout prevention programs, to be successful, had to reflect a clear vision, had to be staffed by creative and resourceful people, had to be strengthened by a collaboration of interests, and had to be student-centered and classroom-based. Adequate training had to be provided, and all parties involved — including students — had to feel a sense of ownership in the initiative and its outcomes.

That's what we believed when we set out, and that's what we heard when we revisited the programs that took root under our initiative. We asked the educators who run these programs to share with us the wisdom of their experiences in the hopes that others could benefit.

We heard, first and foremost, that teachers need to be given the time, the resources, and the flexibility to create programs that they believe best meet the emotional and intellectual needs of the students they have taken the time to know so well. To set the vision that fuels the effort, program directors said it is important to keep the following points in mind:

- How high students reach depends in great part on how high they believe they can go.
- How effective a dropout prevention program becomes depends on the backing it receives from the broader school community.
- How well students learn, and how motivated they are to want to learn — to test their creativity and to satisfy their curiosity by embracing problems and seeking solutions — is linked to how well they are nurtured at home and in the early years of schooling.
- How effective a school district is in its mission to lower the dropout rate and to educate workers and citizens for a global economy and technologically advanced society is often dependent on how well various segments of the community work together.
- How engaged children are in their schooling and how likely they are to continue learning for a lifetime is strongly influenced by the respect and priority education receives in the home.



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This report takes a closer look at the underlying themes of success — that a program must be teacher-led and student-centered. And then it addresses the five points highlighted above. To "SCORE" a victory with students at risk, project directors say educators need to: Set high, yet reasonable, expectations; Collaborate with community leaders; Offset future problems by intervening early; Recruit school district support; and Enlist and energize parents as partners.

The advice doesn't end there. In this, NFIE's third blueprint document on dropout prevention, project leaders offer guideposts to help educators find effective ways to reach and teach students who otherwise might fall through the cracks.

Yet, a careful review of this book will reveal no single "answer" to the dropout problem. It will, instead, point to the application of a consistent set of strategies, an adherence to a specific set of values, the importance of a sense of mission and purpose, and the significance of keeping the child at the center of the program. With the addition of a teacher leader or a group of teacher leaders, the programs, regardless of their dimensions or shape, work — and children are the beneficiaries.

While there are several landmarks that tell us that our projects have been successful, perhaps the most significant is that over 87 percent of our projects have been continued (either by the school districts in which they have been located, or by the securing of external funding) after NFIE support has been completed.

To conclude, this blueprint is about hope: the hope that time, effort, interest, and respect can help turn around the lives of children who, for reasons often beyond their control, are at risk of dropping out of school and out of life. This blueprint is also a salute to the energies and dedication of a very special group of teachers who have refused to give up on disadvantaged students—those most in need of mentors, and yet the most difficult to reach. The words and experiences of many of these teachers have been highlighted in the quotes and stories "From the Front" that appear throughout these pages.

We at NFIE hope that you will find this book a useful guide for charting the course that best meets the needs of your community and, more importantly, the very valuable resource of human talent that flows through your schoolhouse doors.



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EMPOWER TEACHERS TO DRIVE THE INITIATIVE

# EMPOWER TEACHERS TO DRIVE THE INITIATIVE

**When a student is troubled, confused, burdened, or bewildered, a teacher takes note.** The student's schoolwork suffers, his attention is short, his relationships with peers are strained. How effectively a teacher spots these problems and reacts to these manifestations will determine in great part whether a child will succeed in school.

If one accepts the notion that success breeds success, and failure breeds contempt, it is not difficult to see how a teacher is the essential element in any attempt to prevent a student at risk from dropping out of school.

It takes more than sound policies, creative learning materials, and adequate finances to outfit a successful dropout prevention program. It takes heart — a teacher's heart.

A teacher who cares will notice the first symptoms of confusion, despair, and frustration that lay the groundwork for misbehavior, apathy, and detachment. A teacher who cares will see the potential, the talents, and the strengths that are a signature of each child's uniqueness. A teacher who cares will take the time and spend the effort to believe in the student who doesn't believe in himself.

Teachers who care insist that young people acquire adequate life and learning skills to succeed.

To help their students achieve their goals, teachers who care work to secure a broad spectrum of support that encompasses various interests: education, business, family, and community. They collaborate with other teachers to share ideas. And they communicate intent, engage interest, and nurture commitment from community agencies, business and professional organizations, parents groups, senior citizens groups, and civic and charitable organizations.

These teachers get whatever help they can from whomever they can. No stone is left unturned in their determination to provide a forum for students at risk to take risks, deal with emotions, tackle problems, seek solutions, confront conflict, and open up their minds and hearts to learning for a lifetime.

Who are these teachers who take the time to tackle what many people perceive as a thankless, fruitless task, one that is too often destined for failure from the outset? These are teachers who:

- Believe in themselves and their competencies.
- Take risks, trying whatever they think might work with the student at risk, regardless of how likely, and how soon, the payoff will be.
- Take pride in their profession and believe strongly that a good teacher exhibits excitement over, and interest in, all students, including those who exhibit emotional and learning problems.
- Believe that one person can accomplish much by example and by encouraging others to get involved and share effective strategies and insights.

For many students at risk, a chance is all they need: a chance to try to achieve something that experience says is not within their reach, a chance to pick themselves up when they fall short, and a chance to open up to someone who will take the time to listen to them and guide and support them.

To have a positive impact on a community's dropout problem, teachers who take and give chances—who care—need to be empowered to run school-based, needs-driven dropout prevention programs. They need to be encouraged and supported financially, professionally, and politically to give the student at risk the best shot at education.



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# TAILOR PROGRAMS TO FIT STUDENT NEEDS

**tudents most likely to graduate are more likely to have positive self-images.** They believe in themselves and feel good about their accomplishments. Ideally, they can cope with stress and make decisions. They can define the problem at hand and select a solution after evaluating various options and their consequences. They are encouraged to set high expectations and to rise to those set for them. They are driven to succeed. Most importantly, they know there is a network of support that allows them to learn from their mistakes and to rise and try again.

In contrast, students at risk of dropping out are more likely to have little faith in themselves. Their low self-concept is often reflected in their attitudes, their dress, and their behavior. In their hunger for identity, they crave attention and are often labeled "discipline problems" because of the means they use to achieve their ends. Their poor life skills, often compounded by financial and/or relationship troubles at home, make it difficult for them to take control of their lives in a positive way. Impulsive behavior mars relationships and leads to isolation. Frequent school absences set the stage for failure, which breeds contempt for school, rather than a challenge to rise and try again. Fearing the future, students at risk live for the here and now, falling prey to more serious problems, such as crime, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy.

Programs that deal successfully with students at risk begin with the premise that each student, however troubled, has unique talents and strengths that need to be tapped. Success is based on how well the program can identify and meet the emotional and intellectual needs that stand in the way of each student's success.

There are several hallmarks of a successful student-centered program: goals and rules are clearly defined and uniformly enforced; feedback is given regularly and constructively in a nurturing learning environment; and teachers are creative in their efforts to tailor educational styles and techniques to groups of students from diverse backgrounds and with various frames of reference and learning obstacles.

Most importantly, teachers need to set high, yet reasonable, expectations for their students, as well as help them find the means to get there. Respect breeds success by encouraging students to make the effort to tackle a problem, to take the initiative to set a goal, and to persevere until the obstacles in the way are overcome or kept in check.

It helps to keep in mind that students are at the center of many worlds: the world at school, the world at home, the world in the community, the world among their peers, and the world inside their minds. How they function, succeed, fall short, or are respected in one world often affects how well they perform and are perceived in all others.

Too often, though, children at risk wander aimlessly through these worlds, seeking, yet never finding, the positive reinforcement and encouragement they need to achieve in school and in life. A supportive learning environment, one that is student-centered and needs-driven, puts a child at the center of his world at school, giving him or her the greatest chance of success in all other spheres.



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# SET HIGH, YET REASONABLE, EXPECTATIONS

**How high students reach depends in great part on how high they believe they can reach.** All students — the gifted, the nurtured, the troubled and the impoverished — must be given an equal chance to succeed. Yet all too often, conciously or unconsciously, the sights are set lower for youth at risk. Many of these children come from beleaguered families and run-down neighborhoods. With two strikes already against them, the third can be fatal. Apathy can stunt a student's growth in both the academic and social arenas.

Teachers who run dropout prevention programs know this all too well. To offset the negative, they stress the positive by highlighting the possible. Teachers who set high expectations for their students take time to know them, and to understand how life outside the classroom can affect academic initiative and achievement inside the classroom.

These teachers believe in their students. They provide an ample dose of encouragement and positive reinforcement to breed the enthusiasm necessary to instill confidence and diligence. And these teachers enlist the support of others, knowing that getting a child to attend school both physically and mentally is the responsibility of all those who have a stake in the outcomes of public schooling: the family, the school, the workplace, and the community.

*"If you can dream it, you can do it."*
— Banner on display in Capistrano Elementary School, Ysleta, TX.

**SCORE GUIDEPOSTS:**

- Provide the structure and guidance necessary to empower students to take the initiative to learn. Foster a sense of responsibility among students for their behaviors and actions in and outside the classroom.
- Maintain a secure and supportive learning environment that encourages students to take risks and reach beyond their immediate grasp.
- Name a task force to suggest ways to protect students. Police, security officers, school officials, and community members can work together to develop strategies to help prevent crime on school grounds and in neighboring communities.
- Create an outlet for students to discuss at the beginning of each week the conflicts they face at home and in school.
- Recognize that different students learn best under different conditions; tailor teaching techniques accordingly. One student might need more structure and function best with a step-by-step outline of the task at hand. Another student might work best with less oversight; a broad overview might be appropriate. Allow active students to move about the classroom and explore various learning stations. Students with greater attention spans might prefer to tackle challenging assignments at their desks.
- Help students set goals individually and as a group. Ask each student to keep a "goals" book. Set aside a bulletin board to chart progress on a class project.
- Focus on critical thinking skills. It matters more how a student reaches an answer than whether the answer itself is right or wrong. Learning how to learn is a vital life skill.
- Use rewards and incentives to accent the positive; in this case, students who meet their own goals and the high expectations set for them. Be careful not to reward less-than-expected behavior. "False" rewards send the wrong signal, sabotaging the satisfaction that comes from reaching one's goals.
- Stress the importance of setting high expectations by holding workshops and in-service training programs that encourage teachers to use positive reinforcements. Discuss the actions, mannerisms, and words that can send negative messages to students.
- Clearly define, outline, and discuss instructional expectations, making sure they are consistent across subject areas and between grade levels. Students need and want to know what is expected of them from year to year and how what they are learning today fits into the long-range plan.


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- Periodically assess what is expected of students, and at what levels. Review such things as test requirements and grade retention standards. Discuss policies that affect the path a student at risk is most likely to travel.
- Set short-term goals. Students, especially those at risk, need to see that they can succeed and that what they are attempting to succeed at serves a useful purpose. Constant reassurance, frequent success, and a clear view of the application of skills and talents learned are strong motivators.
- Understand the mind-set of a student at risk. Telling a student that hard work leads to success might confuse him, especially if he sees his parents work hard, yet struggle to make ends meet.
- Give students "real" work, not just "busy" work. And don't give students work they are not ready for. Doing so can damage a teacher's credibility and destroy the confidence a student has, or may be developing, in his or her academic talents.
- Give each student the opportunity to shine when working in a group. If one student draws well, have him illustrate the story the group has just read. If one student writes well, have her pen the words to match the illustration.
- Showcase achievement. Have students, individually and as a group, demonstrate or explain what they have learned to their peers. Older students can showcase their strengths by serving as tutors or mentors to younger students.
- Ask students to help set school rules and policies that explain not only what is expected of them and why, but what should and will happen as a result of noncompliance. Ask students to write a school constitution or even a student's bill of rights.
- Stress personal responsibility. Set goals, not limits, and make students aware that there are options and choices available to them in their lives.
- Be tough and consistent in requiring that sound rules be met. While educators and parents can encourage and require good attendance, ultimately it is up to each student to decide whether or not to carry out the directive in light of the consequences.
- Keep tabs on student behavior and let them know that what they do does not go unnoticed. If a student breaks the rules, impose the consequences quickly and uniformly.
- Let parents know when they send mixed messages to their children. If a parent allows a child to miss school to go shopping, or to extend a family vacation, the importance of school is undermined.

**FROM THE FRONT:**
**A 'CLASSROOM FAMILY'**

A third-grade child moved into our school. He was labeled a serious discipline problem because he got into fights, used foul language, and was not liked by his peers. His new teacher set the standards for his behavior right from the beginning. Everyone was to respect those around them. If there were problems, they were to be talked about. They were all there as a classroom "family." And they were all there to learn and to help each other learn. The teacher did not tolerate negative behavior; positive behavior was reinforced.

Right away the teacher gave the new student work that he could accomplish, but something challenging. The student performed well. The work was sent home to show his family his accomplishment.

Over time his behavior improved. He went from a student who was labeled seriously learning-disabled to one who was not at all learning-disabled. The teacher's belief in him challenged him to live up to the expectations she set for him.

The student's experience carried over into his everyday life. He finally got on a bicycle that he was convinced he could not ride because of his low self-concept. And he rode it. He's recently been placed into a gifted-and-talented program.



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# COLLABORATE WITH COMMUNITY PLAYERS

**How effective a school district is in its mission to lower the dropout rate and to educate workers and citizens for a global economy and technologically advanced society is often dependent on how well various segments of the community work together.**

Today, when a rising chorus of voices is calling for education reform, it is imperative that educators clearly communicate to non-educators the obstacles faced and solutions proposed, based on both theory and experience. Likewise, educators need to understand the magnitude and the seriousness of the problems faced by business people who are increasingly hard-pressed to find workers prepared to meet entry-level challenges and to adapt quickly to the changing workplace needs of a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy.

The goal of collaborative efforts is to step beyond rhetoric and into action and to nurture trust and a high level of interest from at least three groups — educators, business leaders and government officials. Reform is a long-term effort prone to short-term setbacks. The formula for success is to set reasonable, measurable goals based on a shared vision, and to commit resources — both money and manpower — for the long haul.

**SCORE GUIDEPOSTS:**

- Define goals and strategies before seeking outside support for dropout prevention programs.
- Qualify, don't quantify, your program's aims and objectives. Stress the quality of the program, not merely the number of students served.
- Welcome suggestions from potential supporters. Be flexible enough to modify plans to incorporate sound ideas and to address constructive criticisms.
- Initiate action, but encourage collaboration. Delegate responsibility whenever possible to create ownership in the program and to free time for overseeing and coordinating the effort.
- Gain respect and clout by joining and/or participating in community groups. The decision-makers you might one day face are very often members of these groups, such as the chamber of commerce, governmental advisory boards, private industry councils, and service clubs or organizations.
- Be creative in your efforts to secure corporate support and funding. Ask business leaders to sponsor classes or schools, to donate equipment and manpower resources, and to match fund-raising receipts.
- Invite business and civic leaders to join school officials in designing ways to connect skills learned in the classroom with their applications in the workplace. Encourage community leaders to serve as speakers, mentors, and tutors; schedule "career day" activities; and institute school-to-work transition programs that allow students to gain credit for work done as interns for local firms.

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*"How do we combat this killer of aspirations that threatens our nation's future? Together. Schools, teachers, parents, civic organizations, social service agencies, businesses, and government; black, white, native American, Asian, and Hispanic: All of us must come together in the national interest."*
— Donna C. Rhodes,
executive director, NFIE.

- Work with health care and social service providers to establish a way to keep students informed about aid available.
- Reach out to the community in as many ways as possible. Host evening socials or concerts. Publish a newsletter to explain your overall mission, communicate your expectations, define your goals, spell out your strategies, and showcase your programs. Do the same in letters to newspaper editors, television and radio station general managers, key legislators, and the governor.
- Name an advisory committee of educators and community representatives to identify and define community needs and to suggest education reform initiatives.
- Meet as often as possible, both formally and informally, with parents, business leaders, and community activists. Hold meetings at school, in business offices, or in the homes of community members. Schedule times that take into account various work schedules, and not just the times school officials are free.
- Set aside a resource area or contact center in the school where community members can meet to tutor students, to discuss ongoing programs, and to propose new initiatives.
- Recognize and celebrate the cultural diversity that makes your community unique. Sponsor multi-cultural activities and community events such as food fairs and music festivals.
- Incorporate community service into the curriculum. Provide the structure for students to work with such groups as the elderly, the sick, the homeless, the poor, or even younger students at risk. Emphasize the benefits to both the doers and the receivers of volunteer services.



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## FROM THE FRONT: TAPPING THE RESOURCES

When I was director of a dropout prevention program, we had a little bit of money from the state. A few teachers got together and asked the superintendent and the principal if we could create an advisory board. We knew there were people out there who could help us make more progress with our at-risk youth. We got the group together — the president of a local bank, the mayor, a member of the city council, and representatives from Health and Human Services and the Recreation Department, among others.

We, the teachers, were all a little nervous. We didn't know what to expect. What came out of our new relationships were things we never expected. Health and Human Services reassigned a child-and-family counselor to our school. She was having trouble keeping up with the kids because they were in school while she was visiting their families at home. The Recreation and Park Services people were able to get some kids into summer programs — for free.

All these people had always wanted to do something to help and they had the resources to do so. They just needed the direction.

*"I thought if I could help provide a vehicle that would give kids the basics — good basic skills, good communication skills, proper discipline, and a positive attitude — it would help our community as a whole."*
— Barney Gottstein, president,
state board of education, Anchorage, AK.

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OFFSET FUTURE PROBLEMS BY INTERVENING EARLY

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# OFFSET FUTURE PROBLEMS BY INTERVENING EARLY

**How well students learn, and how motivated they are to want to learn — to test their creativity and to satisfy their curiosity by embracing problems and seeking solutions — is linked to how well they are nurtured at home and in the early years of schooling.** This crucial time sets the stage for lifelong intellectual and emotional development. Yet today, an increasing number of our children come from disadvantaged homes. A majority of our homeless children have yet to enter school.

Students at risk in elementary school, from whatever background and for whatever reason, are destined to fall prey to that risk in high school. Establishing a dropout prevention progam in the later years of schooling can have the same affect as applying a Band-Aid to a gaping wound: too little too late. The key is to intervene early, to target those children at risk, and to pair them with teachers motivated and creative enough to strategically guide their charges in the direction of success.

Some of those teachers have told us that early intervention programs are based on faith and perseverance. They believe that their work will one day pay off and they persevere despite the understanding that they may never know if those eager, self-confident children who left their classrooms will, years later, earn their diplomas.

These teachers place stock in the adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure; that children who love to learn and believe in themselves are less likely to fail and drop out.

*"You may never see the results of your efforts, but that's all right. You never know when a word you say may be recalled, some time years in the future, and cause someone to change his life."*
— Bob O'Dell, volunteer, Corsicana, TX.





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*"Because of our early intervention program, parents felt confident enough to voice their needs and were able to identify their obstacles to achievement. We had two mothers return to school for their GEDs. Another mother became a classroom aide. All three are now off welfare. The money we saved the government on welfare in two years paid for the whole early intervention program. But more than that, it changed the families' lives."*
— Eugene, OR.

**SCORE GUIDEPOSTS:**

- Help children believe in themselves. Institute programs and teaching techniques that build self-esteem by identifying and addressing the emotional needs of children.
- Invest in staff training. It is essential that those who work with children at risk anticipate their needs, understand the obstacles they face, and recognize their signs of progress.
- Ensure the selection of educational materials that meet a program's objectives and are relative to a student population that is culturally diverse.
- Set up activities that require children to respect each other and to communicate effectively with each other. Hold up as examples children who work well together.
- Don't write off students, however burdened or troubled they may be. Set high, yet reasonable, expectations and reward students who meet these goals. Beware not to disillusion students by setting unreachable goals or rewarding work that falls short.
- Work hard to gain a child's trust and confidence. Deal fairly with students across the board and live up to promises made. Be reliable, predictable, and consistent.
- Impress upon students that they must take responsibility for their education. Discuss with them the importance of lifelong learning and the challenges inherent in everyday experiences at home and at work.
- Share with students examples of how people in various work settings have achieved because of their educational accomplishments.
- Incorporate important living skills into your curriculum. Health services have become an invaluable information source, particularly nutrition information, for at-risk children and their parents.



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- Allow for individualized learning activities in reading and math. Tailor such efforts to a child's needs, strengths, and personality. Some children work best with step-by-step guidelines; others work best with as little direction as possible.
- Math and science classes should focus on hands-on activities, and not rely solely, or even predominantly, on textbook readings and workbook exercises.
- Use technology to add to and complement curriculum offerings. Students who learn to use computers early on are more likely to master them in later years.
- Consult and work with parents, offering them guidance on child development matters. Hold individual meetings or host parent discussion groups.
- Meet with parents once a month, if possible, and in their homes, if necessary. Flag trouble areas, but don't forget to give, whenever possible, positive feedback on a child's progress.
- Stress the importance of giving education a top priority in the home, especially to families that seem to accept tardiness and absenteeism in the early grades. Explain that intervening early, as soon as problem behaviors surface, is the best way to ensure a positive attitude toward education in the future.
- Serve a nutritious breakfast in school to students who show up on time. Consider the effort an incentive that works to improve not only attendance, but also attentiveness in class. Approach community businesses for funding.
- Involve not only staff, but community members, parents, and high school students as well in mentor, or "adopt-a-student" programs. Provide space for parents and children to meet to share thoughts and work together on projects. Ask high school students, some of whom could be at risk themselves, to tutor younger students at risk.

*"Delay means that by the time remedial help arrives, the window of opportunity is already shut."*
— The Ford Foundation

*"Our goal is to bond children and their parents to the school by the second grade."*
— Nancy Mote English, project director, Eugene, OR.





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# RECRUIT SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPPORT

*"Over the years, our teachers and the school administration have formed a close relationship. I believe that's because we have the same goal — quality education. Quality education happens when administrators, teachers, and parents listen to each other and work together to educate and care for children."*
— Sue Guinn, project director, Corsicana, TX.

**How effective a dropout prevention program becomes depends on the backing it receives from the broader school community.** When the program encompasses the best of thoughts from the best of minds, and the vision is shared and the direction is clear, the chances for success are greatly enhanced.

Teachers involved in dropout prevention programs say support needs to come on three fronts. On the school front, teachers need to share ideas, support, and time to better communicate to students, government officials, and the greater community the importance of the task at hand.

On the administrative front, principals need to spearhead the effort, setting both the stage and tone for action. On the policy front, school board members need to back the effort with sound policies and adequate resources, communicating to the community at large the imperative for making dropout prevention a priority agenda item.

**SCORE GUIDEPOSTS:**

- Work for policies that lay the groundwork for the establishment and continuity of dropout prevention programs.
- Beware of bureaucratic pitfalls. Directives of support from the state or local level should encourage and empower administrators and teachers to take the initiative to design creative programs that address the needs of their particular schools and students.
- Hold up as examples successful programs and encourage their duplication elsewhere. Keep in mind, though, the need to adapt programs to specific needs.
- Foster a shared vision for action by documenting dropout statistics in written reports. Be thorough, methodical, and consistent in approach. Follow up the reports with face-to-face meetings with administrators to propose dropout prevention initiatives.
- En route to documenting the need for dropout prevention, keep notes on the academic and personal issues faced by students at risk. Highlight the strategies used to reach and teach these students and why they were or were not successful.



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- Start a public education campaign to enlist the support of government officials. Focus on the economic and social costs of dropout prevention, giving political leaders the information and expertise they need to advocate the cause.
- Reach out to school board members individually and as a group. Gaining their support can be an essential first step in the effort to sign on administrators as allies.
- Keep in mind the audience you are attempting to reach. Teachers, administrators, school board members, local politicians, and statewide officials have their own frames of reference and agendas. Tailor outreach efforts to their perspectives. Anticipate each audience's questions and concerns so they can be addressed quickly and satisfactorily.
- Be creative in showcasing initiatives. Work with media directors and program participants to produce audio-visual tools that bring to life dropout prevention efforts.
- Keep the vision alive by meeting regularly with administrators in review forums to track progress, identify obstacles, and take corrective actions. Make sure that all participants feel at ease to voice their concerns and suggestions.
- Recognize key players. Give "Friends of the Project" awards to administrators and teachers who lend encouragement and support to a program's success.
- Enlighten teachers by providing in-service workshops that focus on the problems faced by, and the behavioral and academic manifestations exhibited by, students at risk. Discuss how students at risk need structure and are hindered by rules and expectations that are not carefully thought out, clearly communicated, and consistently enforced.
- Work to provide mentors for students at risk. Support scholarship and incentive programs aimed to attract and retain teachers who are role models to a culturally diverse student population.
- Beware of "director overload." Delegate responsibility and duties whenever possible to involve more players.
- Encourage an interdisciplinary approach. An English teacher, for example, can be asked to provide a reading list or outline a course for use in a dropout prevention program.
- Focus on the tone of a school's overall academic environment. Warm and supportive learning atmospheres, coupled with a strong and cohesive curriculum, aids in the effort to prevent students from dropping out.

**FROM THE FRONT:**
**COMMUNICATE THE POTENTIAL**

We had one principal go through our teacher-training program for our self-esteem project. Afterwards, she thanked us, saying: "All this time we thought that we were doing fine, but now I can see the potential. I can identify with some of our kids. I feel better about myself, and now I can help kids help themselves."
— Hamilton County, TN.

*"Many administrators don't feel like going out on a limb for kids that are marginal, whose parents won't make trouble. You have got to convince administrators to make it their priority."*
— Marion Pritchett, project director, Boise, ID.

*"The decreasing federal role in education, the poor condition of many state and local economies, and lack of state legislative commitment and leadership to find resources for at-risk programs make new funds for at-risk students difficult to obtain."*
— "Children at Risk: The Work of the States."



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# ENLIST AND ENERGIZE PARENTS AS PARTNERS

*"Parents can make a significant difference in enhancing the education of their children. Even the best of schools and the best of teachers cannot undertake the important task of educating children without parents as allies. Together parents and teachers can form a vital partnership and become an unbeatable team."*
— Mary Futrell, former president, National Education Association

**How engaged children are in their schooling, and how likely they are to continue learning for a lifetime, is strongly influenced by the respect and priority education receives in the home.** Research shows that, regardless of socioeconomic factors, children who come from families that encourage, participate in, and place value on academic endeavors are more likely to achieve.

That's the good news. The bad news is that in too many cities, in too many instances, families are not part of the equation. Many at-risk students come from families that are poor, hurried, broken, distant, or abusive. Or maybe they're just in the dark; willing to spend time to complement and support the efforts of formal schooling, but not quite sure how to go about it.

Educators on the front line say it is essential that the parent-teacher relationship be nurtured. Parents, they say, are a teacher's strongest allies. The encouragement and direction parents give at home enhances the experiences children have in school, aiding in their academic and social development.

Teachers who nurture the home-school connection say it is important not only to communicate to parents the role that they should play, and why, but also to work with parents to show them the role that they can play, and how. To do so, teachers must take the time to understand the dynamics at work in each student's family, keeping in mind that a student's attendance, attention, and achievement are very often affected by the forces of life at home.

**SCORE GUIDEPOSTS:**

- Begin with the premise that parents want to understand and play an active role in school policies, programs, and initiatives. Then take the initiative to sign on parents as members of the team.
- Enhance the team concept by scheduling one-on-one conferences to foster confidence in classroom activities and respect between parent and teacher. Ask parents what it is they want to know more about, such as standardized testing, and share with them your knowledge, guidance, and support.
- Put parents at ease by scheduling home visits. Some parents open up more readily on more familiar turf.



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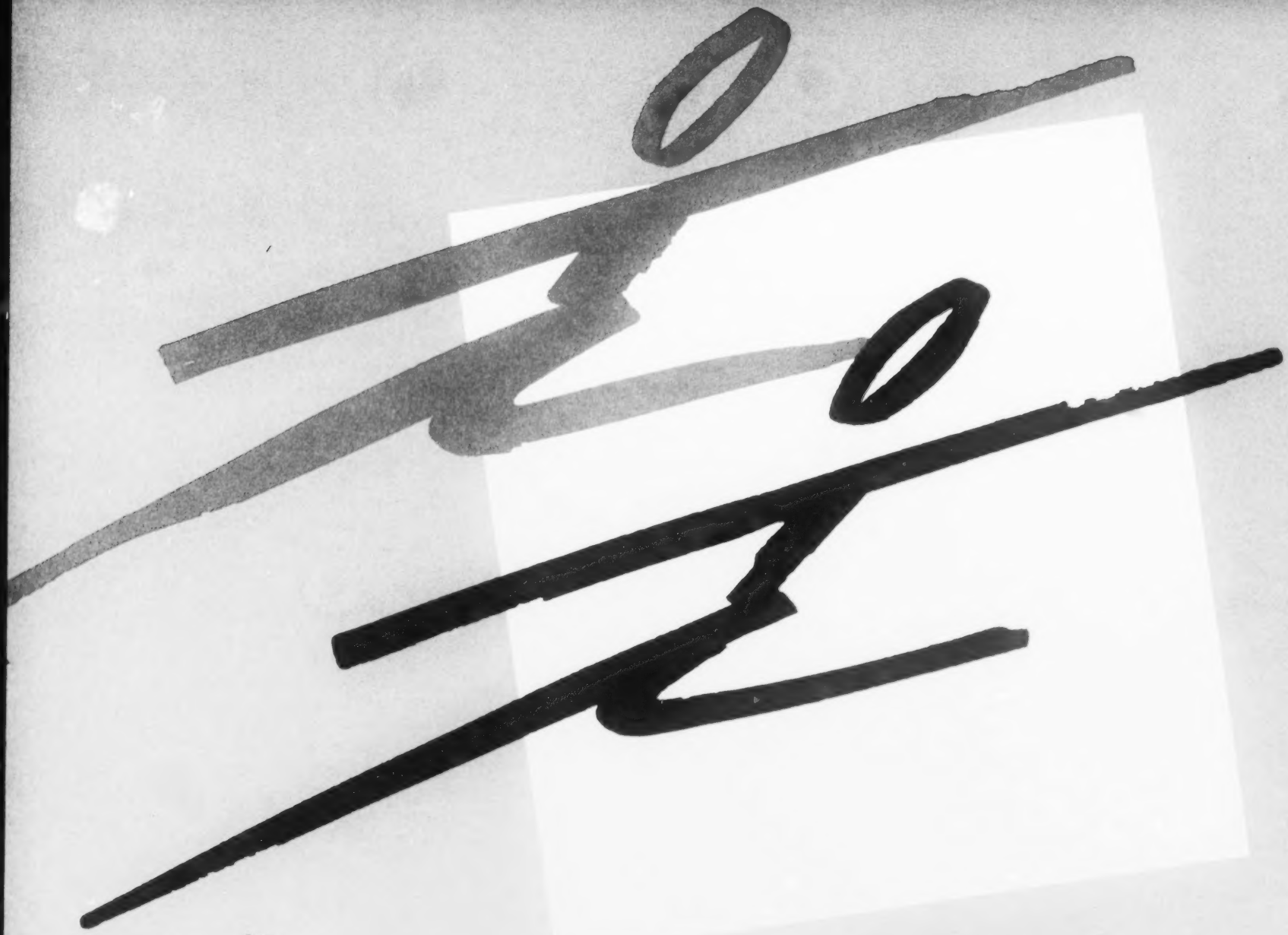





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- Keep open the lines of communication. Share positive, as well as negative, feedback to parents through phone calls or personal notes.
- Encourage parents to spend time in the schoolhouse so they will feel less awkward in their children's "second home." Provide such things as a "parents' section" in the school library and office or lounge space for parent volunteers.
- Take advantage of parental expertise. Arrange it so that parents can volunteer to share their time, talents, and experiences in the classroom, on field trips, or before schoolwide audiences. Consider the effort as one more way to enrich the lives of students.
- Remember to say "thank you" to parents for their efforts, whether by phone, note, or token gift.
- If parents are not available, reach out to grandparents, foster parents, or volunteer mentors from the community at large.
- Rename "back-to-school night" the "family night" and invite students and parents to come together to discuss what they can anticipate in the new school year and what is to be expected of them.
- Encourage parents to play a role at home and provide for their children such things as a quiet study area, a nutritious breakfast, a time to read together, and guidance and supervision over television viewing habits.
- Host "make-and-take" workshops for parents and teachers to work together to design activities or games that parents and children can enjoy together at home.
- Avoid adversarial conflicts by keeping in check snap judgments. If a child is frequently absent, it may be because of family illness or economic restrictions — and not student initiative or lack of adult care. Question parents in a non-threatening way about problem behaviors, empathize with them when appropriate, and work together to arrive at a workable solution.
- Provide a forum for parents to seek support, share ideas, or brainstorm solutions to parenting concerns. Publish a newsletter or organize discussion groups.
- Structure a hands-on role for parental supervision. Require parents to sign their children's homework and to sign permission slips for certain actitivities. The goal is to increase parental involvement in, and awareness of, their childrens' work and experiences in school.

**FROM THE FRONT:**
**FINDING THE ANSWER**

One of the boys in the class consistently failed to bring the notebook that he had been asked to get for his classwork. He had been reminded so many times that it was obvious that he was not 'just forgetting' it. After a visit to his home, we saw how his family lived and we understood why he didn't bring the notebook. His family simply couldn't afford the 79 cents it would take to buy it.

*"Whether they live in housing projects or in middle-income neighborhoods, parents care how their children are doing in school. They want their children to be well-educated; in many cases because they have suffered from a lack of education themselves."*
— Gloria Barragan, project director, Ysleta, TX.



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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- Also, to Linda Chion-Kenney, who wrote and edited the final draft; and to Richard J. Kenney, for copyediting services.
- The NEA, for making dropout prevention a top priority.
- The NFIE Board of Directors, for its commitment to at-risk youth and to the programs that give these students a chance to succeed.
- The members of NEA who have contributed their efforts and dollars to make NFIE a national leader in dropout prevention.
- The staff of NFIE, who embrace and guide NFIE's effort to create and support dropout prevention programs. Special thanks to Cheryl Kane, Harry Mitchell, Kim Beury, James Wilson, Nettie Legters, Brendon McLoskey, Karilyn Smith, Gwen Leak, and Tommie Person.
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- NEA Communications, for its work in highlighting the work of NFIE dropout prevention programs in a variety of media, especially Elvira Crocker and Mabel Barker.



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# NFIE DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

**FIE grants have given teachers nationwide the opportunity to implement their ideas, enabling them to serve as front-runners in the drive for a restructured education system that meets the needs of all students — including those at risk of dropping out of school.**

In a survey of 30 NFIE-funded projects, involving some 120 schools, project leaders reported that their programs led to a significant improvement in test scores (41 percent), a positive improvement in grades (54 percent), improved attendance (74 percent), and improved behavior (80 percent).

In addition, project directors said students involved in their programs would not have otherwise received the support necessary to help improve their self-esteem (72 percent), individualized tutoring (60 percent), and an increased amount of much-needed teacher attention (83 percent). The NFIE Dropout Prevention Survey also found that the programs helped stimulate increased parental awareness of the dropout problem and more widespread interest in their children's education in general (83 percent).

Information for this book reflects the experiences of teachers involved in the 47 projects in 22 states that have been funded by NFIE through its Dropout Prevention Program. These project leaders have met for seminars and workshops, sharing their ideas and forming their strategies by reviewing program successes and pitfalls. These leaders, and their programs, serve as vital resources for educators nationwide who seek ways to lessen the risk for students at risk of dropping out of school.

The NFIE projects, their directors, and key aims and/or strategies are listed below.

**Anchorage Open Door Project**
Anchorage, AK
Bob Waters, project director
- Aims to keep Alaskan children in school.

**Teaching-Learning Communities (TLC)**
Ann Arbor, MI
Carol Tice, project director
- Uses senior citizens as mentors.

**Operation Rescue, Bardstown**
Bardstown, KY
Larry Carrico, project director
- Combines community collaboration, tutoring, counseling.

**Teen Parents Transition Program: Take Charge of Your Life**
Boise, ID
Marian Pritchett, project director
- Allows young mothers to finish school.

**Project KIS (Keep Kids in School)**
Buncombe County, NC
Paula Egelson, project director
- Targets 20 academically at-risk students in grades seven and eight.

**Hooking Kids on School**
Cambridge, MA
Marie Orban, project director
- Builds a districtwide Teacher Dropout Prevention Network.

**Self-Esteem and Motivation for Urban Special Ed Students**
Camden, NJ
Francine Stavisky and Maria Cortes, project directors
- A mediation and problem-solving program, with parents.

**Growing Emotionally Through Self-Esteem Training (GET SET)**
Chatham County, GA
Joe Bell, project director
- A self-esteem program for elementary school students.

**Hang in There (HIT)**
Las Vegas, NV
Ron Montoya, project director
- Tutorial and remedial program for Hispanic youth.

**Operation Rescue, Clayton**
Clayton, NM
Judy Valdez, project director
- Small-group tutoring augmented by recreational activity.

**Operation Rescue, Corsicana**
Corsicana, TX
Sue Guinn, project director
- Volunteers "adopt" 100 at-risk students in pre-kindergarten through grade seven.

**Wake All Kids to Excellence (WAKE)**
Denver, CO
Carrie B. Woods, project director
- High school students tutor students in kindergarten through grade two.



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**Nutritious Breakfast Program**
Derby, KS
Beverliann Wolf, project director
- Serves nutritious snacks and teaches nutrition to students in kindergarten through grade six.

**The Learning Center**
East Ramapo, NY
Mary Mahlstedt, project director
- Total language-based program for at-risk students in grade one.

**Early Intervention for At-Risk Children**
Eugene, OR
Nancy Mote English, project director
- Bonds to school parents and their children in kindergarten through grade two.

**Life Skills Motivational Program**
Fremont, CA
Gail Myers, project director
- Reinforces life skills to learning disabled high school students.

**Operation Rescue, Gainesville**
Gainesville, GA
James Sargent, project director
- Organizes a broad coalition to address dropout problems.

**Operation Rescue, Glendale**
Glendale, AZ
Mary Kay Hoffman and Donnis Deever, project directors
- Daily enrichment seminars and learning labs for at-risk students.

**Math: A Subject for Life**
Gloucester City, NJ
Geraldine Trabant, project director
- Math lab aims to improve skills; involves parents.

**Operation Rescue, Greencastle**
Greencastle, PA
Linda Wolfe, project director
- Addresses students with chronic absences.

**F.O.R.E.V.E.R.**
Hamilton County, TN
Marcia Brashears, project director
- Districtwide self-esteem program for elementary school students.

**Partners for Early Progress**
Jersey City, NJ
Gail Hall, project director
- Transitional class for students about to enter first grade; with parents.

**The Small Business Academy**
Bakersfield, CA
Arlene Kindel, project director
- Practical business skills and academics mixed for high school students.

**Operation Rescue, LaCrosse**
LaCrosse, WI
Mike Schnitzius, project director
- Volunteers tutor, counsel at-risk students in grades four and five.

**On-Site Daycare Center**
Memphis, TN
Wayne Pike, project director
- Provide child-care services to students who are parents.

**Project Rebound**
Metcalfe County, KY
Benny Lile, project director
- Summer program in basic skills for students who have failed.

**Operation Rescue Capacity Building, Gadsen**
Gadsen, NM
Paul Morales, project director
- Aims to ensure students graduate from high school.

**Operation Rescue, Los Lunas**
Los Lunas, NM
Joe Aragon, project director
- An all-district, all-level program with control group.

**Preventing and Recapturing Student Dropouts**
St. Louis, MO
Ted Tunnison, project director
- Main components: commmunity awareness, peer tutoring.

**Gables Productions:**
**Videotaped Theatrical Encounters**
Neptune, NJ
Lucille Alfano, project director
- Students write, produce videotapes to aid problem-solving skills.

**Success Through Employment**
Newark, NJ
Zella R. Pollack, project director
- Teaches employment skills to special education high school students.

**Partners in Learning Skills (PALS)**
Paterson, NJ
Joseph Verilla, project director
- Students in grades seven and eight tutor students in kindergarten through grade four.

**Operation Rescue, Pinellas County**
Pinellas County, FL
James Martin, project director
- Helps parents and students ages 11 through 15 develop life skills.

**Help Us Grow (HUG)**
Pitt County, NC
Sandra Flowers, project director
- After-school tutorial program for at-risk students in kindergarten.

**At-Risk Enrichment Agenda (AREA)**
Pocatello, ID
JoAn Dilweg, project director
- A re-entry program for students who have dropped out of high school.

**The Mentor Program**
Roselle, NJ
Regina Edwards, project director
- Targets 35 disaffected high school students; includes counseling.

**Operation Rescue, San Antonio**
San Antonio, TX
Jan Trujillo, project director
- "Literacy Leadership" summer program for high school students.

**I Can Grow**
Reading, CA
Jessie Underwood, project director
- Vocational training, job experience and placement for high school students.

**Intervention for At-Risk Students: Focus on Career Awareness**
Cottage Grove, OR
JoAnne Allman, project director
- Career awareness program for at-risk elementary school students.

**Project Incentive: Changing Attitudes Towards School**
Springfield, MA
Marguerite Egan, project director
- Elementary school program uses incentives to reward success.

**Project ENABLE**
Tucson, AZ
Geraldine Mackaben and Karen Chatterton, project directors
- Interdisciplinary program for Native American students.

**Partners in Learning**
Irvington, NJ
Jeanne Ferrucci, project director
- Encourages parents to become involved in homework.

**Save Our Schools**
Los Angeles, CA
Richard Rodriguez, project director
- After-school tutoring for Hispanic students at a city junior high school.

**Positive People Program**
Willingboro, NJ
Evelyn Carson, project director
- Collaborative effort to reduce teen pregnancies.

**Parents Involvement for Children's Kindergarten Success**
Woodbridge, NJ
Mary Paris, project director
- Parents assist in developing children's readiness skills.

**Operation Rescue, Woodland**
Woodland, CA
Sandi Redenback, project director
- High level of community support in migrant work area.

**Project CARE**
Ysleta, TX
Gloria Barragan, project director
- Mentors, parent involvement, home visits in Hispanic area.



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